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SPOTLIGHT

HER EXCELLENCY THE CENTENNIAL LIFE

The 100th anniversary of the Nobel laureate Rita Levi-Montalcini



Chou-ju (in Japanese, The longevity is a good thing), a calligraph by Professor Hiroshi Yamamoto, Dean of the Institute of Medical, Pharmaceutical and Health Sciences, Kanazawa University, Kanazawa, Japan.



1986, Stockholm. Rita Levi-Montalcini receiving the Nobel prize from King Carl XVI Gustaf of Sweden.



2009, Rome, NGF Symposium. Luigi Aloe (left), Rita Levi-Montalcini and George Chaldakov (right).

The Turin-born Rita Levi-Montalcini won the 1986 Nobel Prize for Medicine for discovering the nerve growth factor (NGF) (photograph left up), a signaling protein that stimulates growth and survival of nerve cells (1-3). Moreover NGF represents the first cell growth factor discovered, thus creating the growth factor paradigm in cell biology.

Recently it was also revealed that NGF is a multipotent molecule that exerts various effects on a large scale of non-neuronal cells as well as cellular functions, thus implicated for the pathogenesis and therapy of not only neurodegenerative diseases, but also cardiometabolic diseases and skin and corneal ulcers (4-10).

Italia celebrated Rita Levi-Montalcini Days (21-23 April 2009), her hundredth birthday being on 22 April 2009. Symbolically, on 21 April 753 BC, Rome, *Città Eterna*, was founded, that is, 2 762 years ago.

On 21 April 2009 in Rome, Dr Luigi Aloe, the long-standing coworker of Levi-Montalcini, organized an International Symposium held in the Institute of Neurobiology and Molecular Medicine, National Research Council. Invited scientists from many countries including Bulgaria highlighted the recent advance of the NGF's saga that was initiated in the 1950's by Rita Levi-Montalcini at the Washington University in St Louis, MO, USA.

Turning 100 years of age, Rita Levi-Montalcini, who is also serving as a Senator-for-life in Italy, is continuing to work at the Institute of Neurobiology and Molecular Medicine and in the European Brain Research Institute, both placed in Rome, and supported by the Foundation of Rita Levi-Montalcini. In effect, "Her centennial life creates the scientific bridge between two centuries and between two millenia, the pathway followed by many generations", written on the Diploma of the Most Honored Member of the Bulgarian Society for Cell Biology, she received after the lecture of Bulgarian scientist (photograph left down).

"I will present my ongoing results at the next symposium" – Rita Levi-Montalcini said to Dr Luigi Aloe when he informed her about the organization of the Roma-2009 Symposium. Such a positive thinking and feeling may indeed be an important clue for creative longevity. Because *the longevity is a good thing* (see the Caligraphy).

George N. Chaldakov
Editor, *Adipobiology*

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